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NUMBERS

and other
One-Act Plays

GROVER
THEIS

NUMBERS

and Other One Act Plays

BY

Grover Theis

NICHOLAS L. BROWN
NEW YORK MCMXIX

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CHARACTERS

A MAJOR.

A LIEUTENANT, *Philip*.

A GIRL, *Marie*.

MADAME.

The scene is an officer's quarters at a considerable distance from the front. Household furniture mingled with technical war equipment fills the room. A door in the back wall leads to the street; one in the left wall to the kitchen. A stairway leads up along the wall at the right to the second floor. The house suggests a tradesman's home in a small village. The MAJOR, a large robust man of a blunt, blustery nature, is sitting at a large table in the centre, working over official documents. The only light in the room is from a heavily shaded lamp on this table; its zone of illumination extends over only a small space of floor beyond the edge of the table. The LIEUTENANT, a slender young man with sensitive features, is sitting in an arm-chair, facing away from the table.

THE MAJOR. (*Putting together a pile of papers and flattening them by pounding on them with his fist*) There now, that is done! (*Receiving no response from the LIEUTENANT, he walks around and stands in front of him*) What's the matter? Why so woe-begone?

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THE LIEUTENANT. (*Rousing himself*) Oh . . . nothing . . . I was just thinking.

THE MAJOR. (*Laughing loudly*) Bad for you — don't do it. I never do. (*After a pause*) Thinking? About what? The girl back home, I suppose, eh?

THE LIEUTENANT. No — not exactly . . .

THE MAJOR. No — of course not — but in general, yes. (*Walks across room*) That's it. Um, hm. Yes, yes, I know. You're just about that age when you don't know what's the matter with you.

THE LIEUTENANT. Oh, there's nothing the matter. I'm all right. Tired, I guess.

THE MAJOR. Um, hm. Yes, yes, I know; I suppose so. I've handled young fellows like you for twenty years — I know. Then I used to be one myself — so was your father — we went to school together. Yes, yes. (*Laughs*) Physiology is physiology. It was then and it is now. I learned that early. (*Laughs*) That's why I have the constitution I've got.

THE LIEUTENANT. (*Merely saying something*) Yes, I suppose physiology is physiology.

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(A tone of irony attends the statement, but the MAJOR does not appreciate it)

THE MAJOR. Yes, and it's a good thing to recognize that . . . You've been up on the front-line now for about three months, haven't you?

THE LIEUTENANT. Just about — but it seems like three years — even in retrospect. I wouldn't know just how to count the time.

THE MAJOR. Hmm. That's it. I guess that can be arranged. Hmm. I'm going down to Headquarters now and I won't be back for about two and a half hours. You'll be here alone. That's lots of time.

THE LIEUTENANT. Yes, sir.

THE MAJOR. Yes, yes. *(Laughs)* You know the last one had to go back. I don't know who it was — it wasn't me, though. *(Laughs)* But the new one is a lot prettier. Let me see, her name is — she just came before you did — oh, I've forgotten what it is, but she's a pretty one. Flirts like the devil — even with an old man like me. I'll tell Madame to send her in here — to help you with those orders — and not to interrupt you.

THE LIEUTENANT. *(Beginning to perceive the*

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MAJOR's *purpose*) You needn't go to any trouble like that for me, Major. I'm a gloomy sort of chap, who is a better teacher of mathematics than a soldier; so what you think may not be the reason anyhow.

THE MAJOR. Rot! Physiology is physiology whether you're a professor of mathematics or a truck-driver. Anyway, what's the difference? We've got to look after the future of the nation. (*The MAJOR begins in a spirit of levity, but abruptly becomes serious*) Yes, by God, the nation is bleeding white — thousands have been killed; we've got to build a new nation. We can't be squeamish. These are war-times. Numbers count. We have got to have people of our own flesh and blood to carry on what we are fighting for — to keep it sacred, and to perpetuate the heritage for which we are giving our lives.

THE LIEUTENANT. But . . .

THE MAJOR. (*Quickly and sharply*) No buts. . . . You always think of how things were and how they ought to be — never how they are. But I've been in wars before this and if I live long enough I will be in other wars. I know. And these are war-

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times. (*More quietly*) I suppose, my son, you had a girl to whom you'd be married now if it hadn't been for the war. Yes, that would have been pleasanter and more romantic — but romance soon wears off. Yes, it does, it don't last. You're one of those dreamers. I know your kind, you idealists. I always have liked you fellows who can dream — I never could. Hell, I even sleep too soundly to dream at night.

THE LIEUTENANT. So do I nowadays.

THE MAJOR. Well, don't be so sad about it. You're one of these tender souls. I ought to have had more sense and said nothing about it. The idea of going out and leaving you alone on purpose does seem rather too brutal. Oh, you young fellows — you know too little and believe too much.

THE LIEUTENANT. Oh, no — it doesn't make any difference that you told me. (*Smiles*) I see your point of view. What you said about thousands being killed, and needing to multiply our race — that's right.

THE MAJOR. (*Kindly*) Listen, son; don't count too much on any one. The one you think is waiting for you — she's probably off with some one else. Oh,

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that's all right. I had it happen to me, too. There's female physiology as well as male physiology.

THE LIEUTENANT. (*Subtly*) And a good deal of psychology on both sides.

THE MAJOR. Psychology? *Psychology!* Oh, yes — psychology too; but I'll bet my knowledge of physiology, and psychology too, against yours, and give you ten to one on all of your dreams and ideals — and I never studied to be a teacher either. (*Calls*) Madame! Madame! Come here a minute.

(MADAME, a haggish woman of sixty, comes hobbling in from the kitchen)

MADAME. Yes, Major, yes, sir. Here I am — I'm coming.

THE MAJOR. What's the house girl doing? Where is she?

MADAME. She's upstairs sewing, Major.

THE MAJOR. Send her down here to help the Lieutenant file away these papers. He will give her instructions. You go upstairs and finish the sewing for her — and stay there. (*Looks at her significantly, gets his hat and coat, and goes out*) I shall be at Headquarters.

(*The LIEUTENANT rises and salutes. When*

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the MAJOR has closed the door he sits down again. He seems to be resuming an interrupted train of thought, and shades his eyes with his hand)

MADAME. (*After a pause, in a rasping voice*)
You, you young Lieutenants, you! (*Looks at him*)
Goodness gracious, what are you so sad about?

THE LIEUTENANT. (*Half to himself*) Sad?
I'm not sad. (*Looks up*) I was just wishing this war were over so I could go back and finish my post-graduate work.

MADAME. (*Laughs in an annoying manner*) I thought you was going to say back to your sweetheart; or have you forgotten her, or has she run away with some one back there? Oh, yes — studies! War knocks all the romance out of you young people. It was just like that in the last one when I was a young girl. That was forty years ago — just think, forty years!

THE LIEUTENANT. (*Wearily*) The only people who are romantic are old women who get their thrills out of reading novels.

MADAME. (*Misunderstanding him*) Yes, yes, you don't want to listen to an old woman like me.

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But I'll tell you, young man, girls like romance, even if it is play-acting. And maybe this one had a sweetheart . . . yes, yes, I'm going — the Major's orders.

(She clatters up the stairway and disappears. The LIEUTENANT drops back in his chair and closes his eyes. Presently MARIE, a pretty, plump girl, appears at the head of the stairs. She pauses a moment and then comes down. Her manner is rather gay. The LIEUTENANT does not notice her)

MARIE. *(Hesitating at the table)* Madame said the Major wants me to help you with some work.

THE LIEUTENANT. *(Without looking up)* You'll find the papers on the table there.

MARIE. *(Makes a grimace at his pre-occupation and sits down. After a pause, vivaciously)* How did things go to-day, Mr. Bear?

THE LIEUTENANT. About the same as usual.

MARIE. Doesn't seem so. What are you so grouchy about then?

(Bends her head over her work)

THE LIEUTENANT. Grouchy? *(He gets up and walks a few steps away from the table, looking up*

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at the ceiling, closing his eyes tightly, and then opening them again) Oh, I'm not grouchy.

(Walks around behind her, still at a distance)

MARIE. *(Half coquettishly)* You'd better come and see if I am doing this right or the Major might get angry.

(The LIEUTENANT looks at her for the first time. She applies herself to the papers, betraying consciousness of his glance)

THE LIEUTENANT. *(With an attempt at lightness)* If I came too close I might be tempted to steal a kiss. *(She does not answer. Suddenly he takes two or three steps towards her, stares at her bewildered as though to brush something from his mind; then moves quickly to her side, takes her by the shoulders, looks at her. Shouts)* Marie!

MARIE. *(Recognizes him and cries)* Philip!

THE LIEUTENANT. Marie! *(He seizes her in his arms and kisses her, murmuring)* Marie! Marie!

(Suddenly his muscles relax and he pushes her aside as if terrified and stares at her)

MARIE. Why, what is the matter, Philip?
(Touches his arm) Oh, I'm so glad — so glad to

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see you again. It is such a surprise — oh, God, it is good to know you are alive. I never expected to see you here.

THE LIEUTENANT. (*Standing motionless and speaking with difficulty; quotes her statement*) “I never expected to see you here.” No, you didn’t expect to see *me* — I didn’t expect to see *you* either (*Passes his hand over his eyes*), or is it a dream? You!

MARIE. (*Alarmed*) What is it, Philip? Aren’t you glad to see me? Aren’t you well? (*She puts her hand on his shoulder*) Have you been wounded?

THE LIEUTENANT. (*Madly*) Don’t touch me — (*Shudders*) — go away — go away!

MARIE. (*Frightened*) For God’s sake, Philip, what is the matter with you? This is Marie, your Marie. (*He laughs*) Good God, what has happened to you? What have they done to you?

THE LIEUTENANT. (*Still laughing*) Taught me physiology. Yes, that’s it — physiology. (*Sits down and buries his head in his hands. Half-laughing, half-sobbing*) I never knew any before — I spent too much time on mathematics.

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MARIE. (*Coming over to him*) What do you mean, Philip? What are you talking about? Don't be foolish — this is Marie, Marie from back home. (*He looks at her and shakes his head*) We were to be married.

THE LIEUTENANT. Married! Married! (*Laughs*) Physiology!

(*He gets up and walks around, laughing hysterically, artificially*)

MARIE. (*Half angrily*). Good God, Philip, have you gone mad?

THE LIEUTENANT. Mad? I am mad, you say? (*Suddenly he quiets down*) No, I'm not mad. You were glad to see me, you said. I haven't seen you in a year, or is it two years? I can't seem to remember numbers any more — a year, I think. You were in the Red Cross when I had my last furlough — in a hospital. I didn't see you then. You have grown, haven't you, Marie? You are two inches taller — at least that much. How old are you? You are plumper too. But that's natural — that's physiology.

MARIE. In Heaven's name, Philip, what do you mean?

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THE LIEUTENANT. You will have to go back like the other one did — soon — won't you?

MARIE. Philip! No, no, no, that's not true — what you think isn't true.

THE LIEUTENANT. Don't lie, don't lie, I know. Don't be afraid of me. These are war times; the nation is bleeding white. We must look to the future of the nation — we can't be squeamish. Numbers count.

MARIE. But it's not true, Philip — what you think is not true. It's a lie. It's not true.

THE LIEUTENANT. But it should be — it would be, if I hadn't been I. (*Imitates her voice*) “Why are you so grouchy to-night, Mr. Bear?” It is your function in life — your physiological function. It is what you were sent here for.

MARIE. Philip, you are not talking sense. Let me explain — you are crazy.

THE LIEUTENANT. I am crazy? Ha! That's what the Major would say if he saw me now. You were surprised to see me alive — I am dead. You are dead. We are dead to each other — the physiology of us lives — that's all. There is female physiology as well as male physiology. So many

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physiologies. The Major knows physiology. Psychology? *Physiology*. I eat, I drink, I digest, I get wounded, I am healed — that's all. I am one in a number of physiologies — you are another. (*Glares at her*) Yes, you're just a physiology too.

MARIE. Be quiet, Philip, don't talk that way. Don't look at me like that. (*Trying to calm him*) Philip, don't you remember? We loved each other. You loved me. I loved you. I love you.

THE LIEUTENANT. Love! Bah! Romance soon wears off. Ten minutes ago I didn't believe it — now I know. That's psychology though. We swore to be true to each other, both of us. But we have both broken that vow. Be honest! I broke it to-night — on you — before I saw who you were — I broke my vow in this room. I was intended to break it. It was to be for the good of the nation — to perpetuate a sacred heritage. It is dark in here. . . That's what the Major said. It is dark in here; I didn't know who you were. You were a pretty girl who flirted even with an old man like the Major. You were taking the place of the one who had to go back. I stood here — I saw the back of your head and your white neck — I said I had better not

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come too close or I might steal a kiss. I was thinking. . . Physiology is physiology. Tell me, Marie, honestly — you . . .

MARIE. Don't say those things, Philip. You are crazy.

THE LIEUTENANT. Come, come, you have been at other billets. Maybe it hasn't gone as far as I said — but that makes no difference — you are only a physiological number in a national multiplication table.

MARIE. Stop, Philip; I'd rather have you kill me than say those things.

THE LIEUTENANT. Kill you? Why should I kill you? Don't be afraid. These are war times — in peace times I might have killed you — or killed myself. But we kill for a different purpose now. The Major was right. It's a mathematical problem — a problem of numbers — a very simple one. (MADAME, alarmed at the shouting, looks in through the door at the head of the stairway. She notes the uncanny look on the LIEUTENANT's face, listens a minute, and then disappears hastily) Numbers count in war. It is physiology we want to kill. The rest is nothing. If I killed you I would be a

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traitor to my country — it would be treason — numbers count. Less numbers for the enemy, more numbers for us. You are not Marie, the girl I was going to marry — I am not Philip whom you were going to marry. You are a unit in a nation; I am another unit in that nation. It's a problem in multiplication — one of the first things we learned in mathematics — a simple problem. We are strangers. Numbers, mere numbers. They are easy to say: a million men, a million dollars — a billion men, a billion dollars. That's the way things are counted to-day. I wonder how many a million is — yes! I — I, a teacher of mathematics, wonder. A million, billion, trillion. (*Gesture of throwing the amount lightly*) Kill a million souls and spare one life, that is war. What good are souls if we have not men? The Major left us alone on purpose. He was thinking about the future of the nation. We need men to fight and women to bring more men into the world. More and more of them, a million more. . . (*Stretches his arms above his head*) Oh, God! I see a thousand, a million lecherous eyes stare at me as I stand here. I am a fool! A fool! But, by God, I have not lost my sense of humor yet. By

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God, no! I will tell the Major I think it will be twins — God, how he will roar at the joke. It's numbers that count. . .

MARIE. (*Trying to quiet him*) Keep quiet, Philip. Your nerves are shattered. (*She leads him to the chair and tries to soothe him. He does not seem to notice her presence. She kneels before him and the picture is one that suggests domestic happiness. Timidly*) Oh, Philip, I love you. I love only you. You mustn't think such things. Things have changed. These are war times. But remember everything, dear, as if the war hadn't come. We'd be married now — a year — and have our home and be happy together, you and I. The world would be for you and me.

THE LIEUTENANT. (*As if awakening from a dream, takes her head in his hands. Tenderly*) Marie, forgive me. I can't think, I don't know what I have been saying. (*Shudders convulsively*) My thoughts are shrieking shells; they burst in my head into a thousand pieces, a million pieces. I am stumbling through the darkness; my hopes are comrades, hundreds of them, falling by my side. I only hear the roar, the constant roar of guns, thousands of

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guns. I can hear them in my head. We are attacking. (*Falls to his knees*) Now I am in the wire entanglements. There is nothing but wire everywhere, barbed wire. (*Gets up, staring wildly*) Now a rocket lights up the darkness. I see them coming. I hear bullets now, bullets, thousands of bullets. We crawl along, along — on and on. We flounder through the mud. It is black again. The night is black — a million sounds fill the blackness. God, if only daylight would come! Any minute I may be struck — each one seems a thousand long. We are going ahead, hundreds of us — there are hundreds more coming. If only daylight would come! If only the firing would stop! Now we are on them; I am numb, but we go on and on and on. There they are! Hundreds of them — more and more — on and on and on. There is one, one, out of the millions — he is going to shoot me — he is fighting for his life as I am for mine. We are killing each other like a million others. (*He bends over MARIE, who is sitting terrified on the floor*) There are just the two of us now, just two — he is one and I am one. We don't hear the millions, we don't see them. He is stronger than I am — he will kill

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me. (*He seizes MARIE and pulls her up, puts his hand under her chin and forces her head back*) He is weakening, weakening — he is going down. There are hundreds more coming, going. There are always more coming. I must go on and on and on. . .

(*Pushes MARIE aside and dashes for the door. As he reaches it, the MAJOR, followed by MADAME, opens it. He grabs the LIEUTENANT by the wrists and holds him. MADAME rushes in and to MARIE's side*)

THE MAJOR. Easy, there, old man. It's all right. You're all right.

MADAME. I heard him say something about killing her.

(*Helps MARIE up*)

THE MAJOR. Fetch her some water.

(*The LIEUTENANT weakly succumbs and lets the MAJOR push him into the chair by the table. MADAME returns with water and puts MARIE into the other chair*)

MADAME. We were just in time. She's coming to. I heard him say something about killing her, and I looked in and saw him looking so wild.

THE LIEUTENANT. (*With the expressionless face*

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of an idiot begins to talk weakly) There are more and more of them coming, a million, at least a hundred thousand — then more and more. They outnumbered us, I think.

THE MAJOR. Come, come, keep yourself still now.

THE LIEUTENANT. Oh, yes, Major, you're right — physiology is physiology — I give you ten to one on my dreams. Numbers, only numbers count — one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten — eleven, one — no, twelve, thirteen — numbers — I can't count them any more. One, two, three, four. (*Mumbles to himself.* MARIE revives, and upon opening her eyes sees the LIEUTENANT, who looks at her blankly. She shrinks back in terror; MADAME quiets her) Numbers are what count — one, two, three, four . . .

THE MAJOR. (*Stands at the LIEUTENANT's side; shakes his head*) A bad case of trench madness. I wonder what brought it on. They don't usually get it so long after they've been away. (*Pats the LIEUTENANT's shoulder, who goes on mumbling numbers and counting*) You'll need a long rest before you can be used again.

CURTAIN

BETWEEN FIRES

(With O. F. Theis)

CHARACTERS

MENA.

GUIDO, *her former lover.*

LUIGI, *her present lover.*

The scene is in the living room of a fisherman's hut on a hillside facing the harbor on one of the islands off the coast of Sicily. The decorations and furniture are primitive. Nets, ropes and other fishing equipment are scattered about. A colored picture of the Madonna hangs on the wall. In one corner stands an old-fashioned chest. MENA, a sinuous, fiery young woman in native costume, is sitting on a stool mending a large fishing net. LUIGI appears at the window by the door in the back. He looks in and knocks lightly. MENA starts as LUIGI quickly enters the door; he is a tall, rather slight, picturesque young man. In the meantime an older and more sturdily built man stealthily looks in the window for a moment and disappears.

LUIGI. (*Impetuously*) Mena! (*Takes her in his arms*) Mena!

MENA. What are you doing here? I thought you were hiding. (*She looks about fearfully, as though sensing another's presence*) Why did you come out?

LUIGI. To see you, Mena, my beloved! I'd dare anything for you.

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MENA. Sssh! Not so loud. (*Frees herself from his embrace, goes to door, looks out anxiously, and then goes back into his arms*) We must be careful.

LUIGI. Why, we're alone. Everybody is out at sea. The fish are running today —

MENA. I know, but Guido — he —

LUIGI. Guido went too. I watched his boat go out.

MENA. But he is watching you.

LUIGI. I'm not afraid. When the gendarmes tried to catch me over on the mainland, I fought off three of them — (*Makes a gesticulation of deprecation*) — with my own hands and wits.

MENA. (*Proudly*) Yes, I know. But Guido, he is big and strong.

LUIGI. Mena, I am not afraid of him but of the king's customs officers. They came with the ship down there to take me.

MENA. (*Rushes to him and clings to him*) I won't let them take you.

LUIGI. I've given them the slip. Chased them over to the other end of the island. They are fools. (*Significantly*) But I must leave.

MENA. (*Unbelievably*) Leave?

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LUIGI. Yes. The ship sails in an hour. I am going with it — the one they came on.

MENA. Oh, no, no, no!

LUIGI. And you are going with me. See. I have fixed that. (*He pulls out two long strip-tickets from his vest-pocket and shows them to her*) I thought they'd come soon and got ready. I thought Guido had tipped them off.

MENA. (*Taken aback*) Guido! The dog! He thinks he can *make* me marry him.

LUIGI. Marry him? (*Laughs*) Bah! But you don't love him.

MENA. No, but I thought once I did before you came and I promised. He thinks he can make me if he gets you out of the way.

LUIGI. I'll be out of his way, but not because of him. I have to go.

MENA. But you can't go away from me.

LUIGI. Then come. (*Impulsively*) Mena, come, I love you.

MENA. But I can't leave so sudden.

LUIGI. But don't you love me?

MENA. Yes, yes, more than life.

LUIGI. What else matters?

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MENA. My father, my mother, my home, everything. I can't leave them like this. (*Coaxingly*) Ah, Luigi, you remember how we used to talk down there by the spring where I first met you. And how you used to say you'd stay here with me always and never smuggle again and never go away again and become a fisherman like the rest of us —

LUIGI. But, I can't stay here now. Come, Mena, quick. They are after me. They'll catch me if I don't get out of the country. Come, we'll start out new far away from here. I won't have to smuggle any more. We'll get rich, and then we'll come back. But now we must hurry. In an hour we'll be safe at sea.

MENA. But I'm afraid away from here. I have never been away.

LUIGI. You don't want them to put me in prison. Do you? They always do that to smugglers.

MENA. No, Luigi. No! Not that!

LUIGI. And you'll have to marry Guido. (*Goes to door restlessly*) I have got to go.

MENA. (*Resolutely*) Then I'll go with you.

LUIGI. (*Thankfully*) Mena! (*Kisses her*) But quick. Pack up a few things.

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(MENA goes into another room. LUIGI stands alert, peering out of the window. MENA comes back with her arms full of clothes, a vivid red cloak on top. She throws them on the chest by the window, but holds the cloak, looking at it admiringly, and draping herself in it poses to LUIGI)

MENA. Isn't it beautiful. I always wear it at feast days and dances.

LUIGI. But we can't take that. Only what's needed.

MENA. (*Disappointedly turns her back to him and looks out of the window. Starts*) What was that?

LUIGI. (*Turns quickly*) Where?

MENA. I thought I saw Guido's shadow in the bushes.

LUIGI. (*Relieved, laughs*) Guido, he's out at sea. But the gendarmes — no — they can't be back yet. But hurry. The ship is waiting at the pier.

(MENA starts to pack her bundle, which begins to assume rather large proportions)

MENA. But if Guido came back. I'm afraid of him.

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(*She holds up the red cloak, reluctant to leave it behind*)

LUIGI. (*Intensely*) Isn't your love greater than fear?

MENA. Yes, but Guido may help the gendarmes.

LUIGI. I know. That's why you must be quick. Come, I'll get another cloak when we land. Not so much! (*Indicates bundle*) Come!

MENA. No, you go first. Guido says you have cast an evil eye on me and until the spell is broken he'll watch you. He's seen Antonia, the witch-woman, she who can make flowers dry up and fish die at sea. And she has given him something to take the spell off me.

LUIGI. (*Laughing*) I'm not afraid of spells. There's only one spell — the spell of love — and the only spell is our love, yours and mine. No witch's curse can break that. It's a beautiful spell for all time. The fire of my love is like red sunsets.

MENA. How fine you talk. (*She kisses him*) My Luigi!

LUIGI. (*Urging her*) Now, come. . .

MENA. Yes, I'll come, but later — alone. It's safer.

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LUIGI. But if you changed your mind and didn't come.

MENA. (*Passionately*) How can you doubt? You, you are everything. I'll never love anyone but you, I leave everything for you.

LUIGI. Mena!

MENA. It's to make sure never to lose you, I want this, now. Guido would kill you if he saw us together today. You go to the ship alone and wait for me. I'll leave as if to get water from the spring. I'll put my bundle in the pail so they can't see and I'll stop as though to watch the ship go. Then just as it is ready to sail we'll run up together.

LUIGI. You will come.

MENA. (*Crossing herself*) Yes!

LUIGI. The whistle blows three times. I will stand down there. (*Points*) I can see the house, and when you close the door I know you have started. (*Grimly*) And if you aren't there by the second whistle, I'll come back and . . .

MENA. I'll be there. I swear it by the Madonna (*Turns to picture*) who protects from evil eyes.

LUIGI. (*Laughing, points to his eyes*) Evil eye — only love in my eyes — only the spell of love.

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The witch-woman gave something to Guido to cure you. I take you. (*Laughs*) King's officers, Guido, evil eyes, nothing can keep us apart.

(*He starts to go off lightly*)

MENA. Sssh! Go easy — natural, nobody knows then. Walk slow.

LUIGI. (*Laughing*) All right. You foolish, silly child. Now good-bye. (*Is about to kiss her*) No — good-bye we will say together from the ship. Ah, Mena. (*Takes out the strip-tickets again*) Here are the tickets. (*With his head close to hers he reads*) Messina, Palermo, then Gibraltar, good-bye to the sunny blue Mediterranean, then over the big water, you and I, Mena, to the new land — America. . .

MENA. America — so far — America!

LUIGI. Yes, America! There men are free. (*Starts to go and stops in door*) Don't forget to close the door when you start!

(*LUIGI goes out. MENA pauses in the middle of the room and utters the word "America." She moves about nervously, trying to act naturally, but showing suppressed agitation. She puts the last touches on the bun-*

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dle, puts the cloak on again, and wanders about saying good-bye to the familiar objects in the room. She stops in front of the Madonna, crosses herself, and kneels before it. She addresses the image: "Madonna Mia, protect my father and mother whom I am leaving forever today, forgive me for the hurt I am doing them; Madonna Mia, give me all that is good." The first whistle of the steamer is heard. She starts up. Sees the cottage-door closed by some invisible hand. She runs over to the door, and finds it locked from the outside. Unseen by her, GUIDO steps in through the window. He moves toward her from behind. She turns suddenly and they meet face to face. She screams)

GUIDO. What's the matter?

MENA. (*Controlling herself*) You, Guido, you here? You scared me.

GUIDO. You shouldn't be afraid of me.

MENA. I'm not, but you scared me coming up behind like that.

GUIDO. (*Half sincerely*) I'm sorry.

MENA. Never mind. What did you close the

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door for? (GUIDO *laughs*) Why aren't you fishing?

GUIDO. I wanted to see you.

MENA. I've told you I don't want to ever see your face again.

GUIDO. It wasn't always that way.

MENA. I don't care. It's so now. Go away!

GUIDO. You used to love me. You used to put your arms around me and kiss me, before that smuggler from the mainland came. But they'll get him yet.

MENA. He's not afraid.

GUIDO. Bah! They're all cowards at heart, those smugglers. Talk fine and brag! But I love you really, Mena, and the fire of my love is like the hearth's in winter time. I'm a fisherman, true and honest, like our fathers and fathers' fathers. You are a fisherman's daughter and we were to be married next Saint's day. That is as it should be.

MENA. Go away, I hate you.

GUIDO. (*Striving hard to control himself*) No, you love me. You can't help saying what you do because he's cast a spell on you. I know. That's what Antonia, the witch-woman, said. She's given

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me something to break it. (*He tries to give her a small amulet*) Take this and wear it next to your heart and you'll love me again.

MENA. (*Snatches the amulet and throws it out of window*) Spell! (*Laughs*) There's only one spell and that's the spell of Luigi's love. There's no other spell. I don't want your love. (*As though dismissing him*) Go away.

GUIDO. (*Tensely*) Never. I know what you mean to do — run away with Luigi today. (*More softly*) I might go and tell the gendarmes, but I'm going to give him a chance for your sake. I heard every word you said.

MENA. (*With contempt*) You spied on us?

GUIDO. You were going to walk down slowly as if to get some water, and hide the bundle in the pail, and run aboard the last minute. You were going to close the door when you started. The door is closed now and he thinks you have started.

MENA. (*Runs to the door and tries to open it*) Oh! You coward.

GUIDO. He thinks you have started and you won't come and he'll think you've fooled him and he'll go alone.

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MENA. (*Startled*) No, he won't. (*Pushes at door*) Let me out.

GUIDO. No, my little bride, you'll stay right here. (*MENA moves back and forth while GUIDO watches her. She gets her back toward the cupboard and, standing against it, furtively opens a drawer, taking out a kitchen-knife, which she conceals behind her. Suddenly she makes a dash at GUIDO, who catches her by the wrist. He takes the knife away and throws it out of the window after the amulet*) That's a fine woman, a woman of spirit for me. I'll tame you when we are married.

(*He draws her into his arms. She struggles desperately for a moment and slips away from him*)

MENA. I'll kill you. Luigi will come back — he is coming back, yes — we'll kill you.

GUIDO. (*Enraged*) You will? (*He seizes her around the waist and, picking up a piece of rope, ties her to a chair. Worn out by the struggle MENA sits limply. GUIDO, speaking more calmly*) Now let him come. I can meet him alone, and I am a fisherman, stronger than he is, that whipper-snapper of a smuggler. (*The second whistle blows. MENA*
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starts. GUIDO *looks out of the window*) They are getting ready to go now. (*Taunts her*) I don't see him. He's on board — waiting for you, and you are tied in a chair. When he has gone the spell will be broken.

(MENA *has struggled desperately to free herself. She is afraid for LUIGI should he come back, and afraid that he may think she has deceived him*)

MENA. He will not go without me — he will come back.

GUIDO. The gendarmes will get him if he doesn't go today.

MENA. (*Contemptuously*) Gendarmes! He's given them the slip before.

GUIDO. Not if he comes back when I am here.

MENA. (*Desperately*) Oh!

GUIDO. But he won't come back — you will see that my love is stronger than his.

MENA. You still love me, when I don't love you?

GUIDO. (*Passionately*) Love you, Mena? It is only the spell he has cast on you. It won't last long.

MENA. Love lasts forever.

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GUIDO. Yes — and you loved me first.

MENA. (*Cunningly*) So I did — you may be right, *Guido!*

GUIDO. (*Eagerly*) That's the way you used to say *Guido*.

MENA. You really love me, Guido?

GUIDO. Love you!

MENA. You say his love is only a spell?

GUIDO. Yes — and the spell is breaking.

MENA. How do you know when the spell is breaking — *Guido?*

GUIDO. When the old love is back in your voice as you speak my name.

MENA. But if he comes back?

GUIDO. If he comes back.

MENA. You are so strong, Guido.

GUIDO. I am like a baby in your hands, Mena.

MENA. Is that why you tie me? (*She looks at him with soft eyes and turns out her hands*) It hurts.

GUIDO. (*Solicitously and taking her hands*) Did I tie you too fast?

MENA. Guido —

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(He is kneeling before her and looks at her tenderly. She returns the look)

GUIDO. *(Trembling)* Mena — you love me again — the spell is broken. Mena, I have hurt you. *(Hastily loosens the rope)* Mena!

(She listlessly submits to his caresses)

MENA. *(Slowly)* I feel so strange. Don't look at me, Guido.

GUIDO. Mena, my Mena!

MENA. Something is choking me — something is — it must be the evil spirit leaving my body. *(She straightens up tensely and then relaxes)* Guido!

GUIDO. Mena! The spell is breaking.

MENA. What did the witch-woman give you?

GUIDO. Mena!

MENA. Untie me. *(Tries to touch him)* Help me, Guido, Guido. *(He loosens the rope completely. She rises and moves stiffly; staggers. His eyes follow her as she moves toward the window)* I can't breathe. Water, Guido. *(He turns to get water for her. As he does so she casts a hasty glance out of the window. Taking the water, she staggers again. He helps her. Almost convulsively she goes*

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into his arms. He supports her. She murmurs) Guido, Guido. (MENA is facing the door when LUIGI passes the window. She sees him. He is at the door in a moment and opens it. Stands amazed at seeing MENA in GUIDO's arms. She cries out) Luigi, help. (She clutches her arms around GUIDO's neck to hamper him. GUIDO turns, sees LUIGI, and pushes MENA from him. The two men approach each other and grapple. LUIGI is getting worsted. MENA tries to help him. Suddenly she sees the net. There is a break in the struggle. She slips behind GUIDO, throws the net over his head and shoulders. He becomes entangled in it and falls to the ground. MENA runs for her bundle and picks it up with her red cloak. GUIDO reaches through the mesh of the net and catches her skirt. She stamps on his hand) Luigi, Luigi, quick, quick, the ship is waiting — for America.

(They run off)

CURTAIN

THE CRACK IN THE BELL

CHARACTERS

AN OLD MAN.

A YOUNG MAN.

PASSERSBY.

It is in Independence Square on a warm June night. Through the trees the State House can be seen; the illuminated clock in the tower shows distinctly. Arc-lights, now flickering, now sputtering, reflect huge shadows of leaves and branches on the pavement. On each of the benches which line the path in the foreground, except one, the figures of sleeping men are seen. Some are stretched out, occupying a bench alone; others are sitting slouchily with their heads sunk in their chests, two and three on a bench. On the nearest bench to the right sits an OLD MAN. His clothes are slovenly and he has drawn his dirty felt hat over his eyes. On the other end of the bench sits a YOUNG MAN. He wears a soft black hat and a soft shirt, and his suit shows an indifference to clothes.

The time is past midnight. At intervals the drone of street cars and their creaking as they start and stop is heard. Occasionally delivery-wagons rattle noisily over the cobble-stones and trolley-tracks on

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the streets bordering the square. The hoarse sound of river-boat whistles comes now from nearby and then from farther away.

The YOUNG MAN's attitude is one of nervousness, which his sensitive features betray. The OLD MAN is sitting sideways in a careless posture, propping his head up on one hand. A PASSERBY on his way home notices the two men despite his hurry. They hardly regard him. Presently the YOUNG MAN stirs impatiently. The OLD MAN looks up without any show of interest.

OLD MAN. (*After a pause gets out an old pipe and a bag of tobacco. He fumbles in his pocket for a match*) Got a match, stranger?

YOUNG MAN. (*Reaches into his coat pocket and hands one to the OLD MAN*) Hold that a minute. It's the last one I got.

(He takes out a cigarette, which he has been carrying loose in his pocket)

OLD MAN. (*Quietly*) Little more cheerful with the old pipe goin'.

(He lights the pipe and hands the burning match to the YOUNG MAN)

YOUNG MAN. Yes, for about five minutes.

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OLD MAN. Well, that's somethin'. It's a couple a hours yet afore daylight.

YOUNG MAN. Are you waiting for daylight?

OLD MAN. Not waitin'— I'm not waitin' for anything, but I know daylight will come.

YOUNG MAN. (*Shrugs his shoulders, dissatisfied*)
Hm —

OLD MAN. Of course, it'll come, and then another night. Be funny if daylight didn't come once and everybody'd wake up and find it was the same as when they went to bed. Folks'd think the end of the world had come and be afraid they was dead.

(*The idea amuses him. The YOUNG MAN does not answer. He seems to be lost in his own thoughts. Four young people, two boys and two girls, chattering loudly, approach. One GIRL says, "Let's take a boat-ride Sunday." They lower their voices in passing and can be heard laughing after they have disappeared down the path*)

YOUNG MAN. (*Half to himself*) They are waiting for Sunday to come.

OLD MAN. (*Changes his position and after scrutinizing the face of his companion straightens up*)

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Young feller, I've sat on park-benches for near onto fifteen years, and I'm figurin' you're doing it for the first time. Did you lose your job?

YOUNG MAN. (*Abruptly*) No — I've got a job.

OLD MAN. (*A quizzical expression not without a touch of humor appears on his face*) Been crossed in love?

YOUNG MAN. No — there are other reasons why people sit on park-benches. I don't know what yours is and you will not understand mine.

OLD MAN. Mebbe you don't think. The real reason is about the same. I ain't lost no job — didn't have any to lose — or anyhow I could get one if I wanted to, and crossed in love ain't the reason neither. (*YOUNG MAN looks at him as if about to say something, but remains silent*) When you first sat down here, I saw you sort of stop and I thinks to myself you was on your way to the Delaware River down there, but you sort of ain't got the courage. I started for a river once myself. The world and me had an argument. I felt about the same as you do. I got as far as jumpin' in the water and then a bum of a stevedore pulled me out. That set me thinkin'. Nobody'd known he seen me

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jumpin' in, and I've often wondered why he bothered to pull me out.

YOUNG MAN. And now you want to sort of pull me out of the river — you want to talk me out of jumping in.

OLD MAN. Then, it was right that you was thinkin' about doin' it?

YOUNG MAN. (*Assuming carelessness*) It will help the conversation if I say so.

OLD MAN. Talkin' it over won't do no harm. You can still jump in afterwards. I suppose you don't think I'm much of a prospect to offer you against jumpin' in the river. I just told you I've been sittin' on benches for near fifteen years. You hadn't thought of that as an argument.

YOUNG MAN. Arguments haven't anything to do with what a man does, whether it is kill himself or buy a breakfast.

OLD MAN. You're right about that — you got an old head on young shoulders.

YOUNG MAN. And since I have an old head I might as well die. My body has nothing in store for it except the grave and worms; physical pleasures don't interest me.

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OLD MAN. (*Ironically*) Arguments! (*The YOUNG MAN looks at him quickly, then laughs appreciatively. A pause follows, during which he seems to be trying to phrase an answer. The OLD MAN sticks his fore-finger into the bowl of the pipe*) You ain't got no more matches, have you?

YOUNG MAN. These *cheerful* five minutes of the pipe have passed.

OLD MAN. Rather *cheerfully*. (*A scrub-woman on her way to work drags wearily past. Her face is tired and wan. The OLD MAN follows her with his eyes*) I feel sorry for her — looks as if she had a baby coming, too.

YOUNG MAN. I feel sorrier for the baby. (*He gets up nervously, walks a few steps and then sits down again*) Oh, it is all useless. I left the old country inspired by the stories of the new world. I came here to the great democracy, the land of equality, of opportunity. Our history books in the chapter about America told a lot about the freedom and glory that rang out on a bell. I came here with that sound in my ears — but that bell doesn't ring any more. There is a crack in the bell. They said any man could be president here; I felt that I could

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conquer the world. Hah! I started in as a waiter and saved my money to study at nights in the university. I found nothing there — (*Deliberately*) They are merely *waiters* of another kind.

OLD MAN. And so you thought you might as well end it all. Instead of becoming a *waiter* yourself — you thought you might *find* something in death.

YOUNG MAN. (*Buries his head in his hands*) And you make me think there is nothing to end — that life is living death. (A LABORER *passes, looking curiously at the two men*) He's happier than we are.

OLD MAN. And when he comes home to his dirty house and a naggin' wife, he'll think of us and say we're happier than he is.

YOUNG MAN. (*Sardonically*) That's poor consolation, or are you trying to convince me that my lot is not so bad?

OLD MAN. Oh, I don't know — I've lived a while longer than you have.

YOUNG MAN. Is that offered as something to live for?

OLD MAN. (*Sharply*) I ain't offering nothin'

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(*After a pause*) You was just thinkin' about that liberty bell over there what rang out a fine song for freedom and then cracked. I started out a fine young man, too, like you, and I cracked — and you'd better stop ringing now or you'll crack too.

YOUNG MAN. Which is rather a picturesque way of describing disillusionment.

OLD MAN. Call it what you like. (*The clock in the State House tower strikes one. The OLD MAN turns slowly and looks at it*) Half past twelve. You can't tell now without lookin' if it's half past twelve, or one o'clock or half past one.

YOUNG MAN. Does it make any difference?

OLD MAN. Funny how time passes. Have you ever tried to catch time? (*Chuckles*) It's a funny feeling. (*Leans forward as if trying to do it in his mind*) Pesky feelin', just like a mosquito that buzzes in your ear and you slap at it and miss it. But I'll bet some of them scientists will do that yet.

YOUNG MAN. You mean, think they'll do it. Another illusion. Time goes on and on to nowhere — everything goes on to nowhere.

OLD MAN. 'Cept us. We stop some time.

YOUNG MAN. Yes — even while we are alive, some

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of us. The people fooled themselves a long time into believing there was a heaven or hell after this.

OLD MAN. And there's lots of 'em yet who does.

YOUNG MAN. Do you?

OLD MAN. I don't know. We'll find out when we die.

YOUNG MAN. And you stop me when I seek to find the answer in death.

OLD MAN. It'll come anyhow. There ain't no hurry.

YOUNG MAN. But in the meantime — this eternal nothingness of life.

OLD MAN. Do somethin' else.

YOUNG MAN. What?

OLD MAN. Anything — I don't know. I'm sittin' around watching the show. Sometimes it's interesting and sometimes it ain't. I've been thinkin' of goin' West.

YOUNG MAN. West? Is it any different there?

OLD MAN. Mebbe not, but I'm kind a gettin' restless myself. I've got to be goin' somewhere and doin' somethin'.

YOUNG MAN. (*Suddenly*) I'll go with you. I'd like to try your way — maybe.

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OLD MAN. Listen, young feller — I'm like that liberty bell. I'm cracked — I don't ring any more. I got folks as remember me when I was a fine strong young man like you, just like as folks used to remember that old bell and make a relic out of it. When that bell was ringin' they had a lot of fine dreams about liberty and democracy. They saw it all as if it was already, but there ain't no more liberty now than there ever was.

YOUNG MAN. But I can take care of you — you're not young any more. (*Interested*) It would be *doing something*.

OLD MAN. Take care of me, as if I was an old relic. Like hell! You ain't cracked yet. You ain't got time to bother with an old man like me.

YOUNG MAN. But the old bell is well taken care of.

OLD MAN. By the State and a lot of old dames. So I'll be taken care of by the State or a lot of old dames — in prison or a poorhouse.

YOUNG MAN. I wonder if that is pessimism or optimism?

OLD MAN. It's horse-sense. How many thinks

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of what that old bell stands for except in Fourth of July speeches and history books?

YOUNG MAN. But . . .

OLD MAN. But what? You know I got a theory — the Bible says let your answer be yea or nay.

YOUNG MAN. Oh, Lord — you're going to repeat some tawdry platitude you heard in a mission while you were getting in out of the rain —

OLD MAN. (*Continuing*) But that ain't my doctrine. There is always a *but* and it's a good thing.

YOUNG MAN. You are wiser than the Bible?

OLD MAN. No — but just the same, if there hadn't been no *but* you'd be in the river now. (*There is a pause. The clock in the tower strikes one*) What time do you go to work in the mornin'?

YOUNG MAN. Eight o'clock.

OLD MAN. It's one o'clock now — and I didn't have to look at the clock to know it.

YOUNG MAN. (*Slowly*) I think I understand what you mean.

OLD MAN. I mean you had better go home and get some sleep.

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YOUNG MAN. Yes! (*Resolutely*) I will jump in the river tomorrow — but not the Delaware — the river of life, where the torrent is strongest, and I shall flow with it wherever it may lead. But I want to see you again. (*Rises*) Where will you be tomorrow?

OLD MAN. (*Looks at him quizzically*) I dunno. Lookin' for the fountain of youth.

(*Turns and looks away*)

CURTAIN

THERE'S A DIFFERENCE

CHARACTERS

BUTWELL SHARP, *A Professor of literature and author of books on folklore.*

ERNEST, *His nephew and a student in his classes.*

ELSIE.

The place is New York; the time is three in the morning; the scene is Professor Sharp's bedroom. Moonlight streams in through a window, illuminating a section right side of the room and disclosing a sort of sleeping-porch or alcove built out from the right wall. Through the partly separated curtains of the alcove a bed can be seen, the contour of its covers showing it to be occupied. Moonlight through another window falls upon a big center-table over which a large enveloping cover is spread. An arm-chair stands in front of the table, at an angle slightly facing it. A straight-backed chair stands in the light of the window beside the alcove. Upon this is a glass of water. A lamp stands on the center-table. A wide, curtained doorway leads to the hall. The entire room is equipped with gymnastic apparatus, such as dumb-bells, Indian-clubs, weights, a medicine-ball, etc. The arrangement of this is indifferent except that near the alcove stands a "horse" and across the room from this a punching bag is suspended.

THERE'S A DIFFERENCE

Presently ERNEST and ELSIE appear at the doorway in an attitude of caution. ERNEST is garbed in a fantastic costume of no particular description. ELSIE represents Columbine. Both wear masks. The figure in the bed stirs.

ERNEST. Shishh — wait a minute.

(He enters the room carefully and pulls the shade down. Starts to do same next to the alcove when he kicks over some Indian clubs with a clatter. ELSIE is frightened and disappears. ERNEST crowds against the wall. Pause. ERNEST then looks out of the doorway and beckons to the girl, conveying the idea to her that it will be all right for her to sit down and wait. Then he proceeds to window at right. He looks out a moment, breathing deeply.Laughs to himself and, not thinking, he sits down upon the glass of water. The fall of breaking glass is heard. Half loud he exclaims, "Wow!" He hurries across the room and squats behind the arm-chair. There is a commotion in the bed. Presently a scholarly and owl-like, but frightened head, appears between the curtains.

THERE'S A DIFFERENCE

SHARP. Who — who — who's there?

ERNEST. (*Aside*) Good Lord!

SHARP. Who — who —?

ERNEST. Whoo — whoo — said the owl.

SHARP. What's the matter — who is there?

ERNEST. (*In sepulchral tones*) No one — you are alone.

SHARP. (*His head disappears for a moment and then he looks out again, holding a revolver shakily.*

ERNEST *crawls under the table.* SHARP *cautiously emerges from the bed. He is clad in noticeably blue pajamas. He steps into the water from the overturned glass*) Ouch — what's that on the floor?

(*He half gets back into bed and then returns forth, looking under the bed. He ventures farther out and quickly turns on wall-light by alcove.* SHARP *fairly trembles as he moves toward table sideways, facing the door. He advances suspiciously.* ERNEST *is seen to peer out between folds of table-cover*)

ERNEST. (*Reaching out his hand he strokes SHARP's leg admiringly*) What wonderful blue pajamas. (*SHARP jumps, screams, drops revolver and dives rapidly back into the bed.* ERNEST *crawls*

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from under the table and picks up revolver) Did I frighten you?

SHARP. Who, who are you — who are you, who, who —

ERNEST. (*Toys with revolver*) To-whit-to-whoo.

SHARP. (*Frightened*) Look out with the gun. (*ERNEST throws it on the table*) The jewelry is all in my wife's bedroom.

ERNEST.

I care not for gems or gold that glitters.

My wealth is a jest and bird-song twitters.

SHARP. (*Coming out*) So it is you?

ERNEST. No, it is not. You think you recognize my voice and person. They are me, I admit, but the spirit is new.

SHARP. (*Angrily*) What do you mean by trying to scare me?

ERNEST. (*Innocently*) Did I scare you?

SHARP. I suppose you think this a practical joke?

ERNEST. You are wrong, Uncle. (*Whimsically*) This is far from a *practical* joke. It is an *impractical* joke — a fanciful joke.

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SHARP. (*Near him, suspiciously*) Ernest, you have been drinking. You are drunk.

ERNEST. (*Ecstatically*) Drunk — perhaps — Be drunken, saith Baudelaire — be drunken with wine, with women or with song — with one or with all, but be drunk. Yes, I am drunk, but not as you think.

SHARP. Don't talk so loud — you'll wake Aunt Rachel — and I don't want her to see her sister's son in this condition. (*Reproachfully*) And she sent you to live in my house and attend the university where I am professor that you should not fall into bad habits.

ERNEST. Don't cry, Uncle —

SHARP. Where have you been? Tell me. You have been in bad company.

ERNEST. Uncle — how can you say that — bad company — but you don't know.

SHARP. It is my duty to the family to get at the bottom of this. Sit down there and tell me the truth from the beginning.

ERNEST. Gee, but you look funny in blue pajamas — they almost match your eyes.

SHARP. Do as I tell you. You needn't incrim-

THERE'S A DIFFERENCE

inate your fellow-students, but tell me what you have been doing. You were all right when you left your Aunt Rachel and me after supper to go to your room and study.

ERNEST. No, I was not all right. But I shall tell you the truth from the beginning. As you say, I went to my room to study for your examination tomorrow — the examination in medieval folklore. (*SHARP is sitting behind the table, ERNEST in the arm-chair*) I studied your book — here it is (*Picks it up off table*) The tenth chapter — entitled “Till Eulenspiegel” —

SHARP. Come, come — don't waste time over non-essentials.

ERNEST. But, Uncle, this is very essential. Ah — I read this chapter — it is masterful. “Till Eulenspiegel and His Merry Pranks” — here it is written. (*Becomes enthusiastic and reads*) “Till Eulenspiegel is the embodiment of the spirit of rebellion against conservatism and tradition, the perverse mocker of accepted standards. Till Eulenspiegel represents the greatest single factor towards the emancipation of mind in the middle ages.” Ah — and what pranks he played.

THERE'S A DIFFERENCE

SHARP. Come, come; I will not have you jesting at me and my book.

ERNEST. (*Laughs*) Ah, but I must. That is the point. (*Loudly*) I am Till Eulenspiegel to-night.

SHARP. (*Ill at ease*) Keep quiet or you'll waken Aunt Rachel.

ERNEST. She sleeps too soundly, Uncle and Professor — embodiment of conservatism and tradition. Yes, I read in your book about Till Eulenspiegel — I could not study any more. Congratulations! How attractive you make him. You were inspired when you wrote it. And it inspired me. I knew there was a masked-ball to be given by artists to-night. Good-bye to study, good-bye to traditions. Thither I would go and be Till Eulenspiegel — see, I improvised this costume and then I went, inspired by your book. Ah, Uncle, it was living your book. A merry prank.

I stepped on fat men's feet,
Poked them in their paunches;
These tricks I would repeat,
Kick them on their haunches.
Where women wear no hose,

THERE'S A DIFFERENCE

But are not less refined,
I made a mental nose,
At study and the grind.
A fat colonial dame,
Was partner in a dance;
I revelled without shame.

SHARP. Ernest, what has come over you? This is positively disgusting, but go on —

ERNEST. Ah, yes! I will pass that colonial dame by. Ah — then I found Columbine at the dance. Here you tell about her too in your book — the eighth chapter. Ah, Columbine, she was lovelier than I dreamed. Such eyes, such hair, such grace. Ah, Italy, it was your Venice on a moonlit night that gave us Columbine. It was Venice. I know — don't say no, don't cite facts. It was Venice. She was dressed — Ah — Uncle, it was like a dream. (*Suddenly*) No — Columbine was real. I brought her with me. (*Goes to doorway quickly, disappears, and calls*) Columbine — sweet Columbine.

SHARP. (*Completely dumbfounded*) Ernest, come back here. Keep still, be careful, you will wake Aunt Rachel.

THERE'S A DIFFERENCE

ERNEST. (*Returns with his arms around ELsie*)

I found her half-asleep
Here in the hallway-chair,
The moonlit night would weep,
If it were half as fair.

SHARP. (*Utterly confused, but indignant*) Who is this woman?

ERNEST. (*Presenting them to each other*) Columbine — Uncle — Columbine, about whom you wrote a whole chapter.

SHARP. Ernest, take that creature away from here.

ERNEST. Wait! (*Seizes a piece of paper from table and rapidly makes a cone*) There, Uncle! (*Puts it on SHARP's head*) Now you are Pierrot. Your blue pajamas make an admirable costume. (*Puts ELsie's hand in SHARP's*) I'll go. (*Assuming an attitude of dejection*) I'll be Harlequin, sad Harlequin, who always is cheated.

SHARP. (*Angrily dropping ELsie's hand and throwing cap on the floor*) You shameless profligate, you —

THERE'S A DIFFERENCE

ERNEST. Fie on you! (*Picks up cap*) Then I must again be Till Eulenspiegel and finish my merry prank.

ELSIE. (*Bored, to ERNEST*) Say, funny fellow, I'm awfully sleepy —

SHARP. (*Interrupting, to ELSIE*) What do you want here?

ELSIE. I want to go to bed.

SHARP. Get out of here, you hussy —

ELSIE. (*Bristling*) Hussy — I want you to know —

ERNEST. (*Conciliatory*) Tush, sweet Columbine! He is a professor and he spoke that word in its Shakespearean capacity.

ELSIE. (*Somewhat mollified, to SHARP*) Anyhow, I'm not walking before strange women in my pajamas — even if I do want to go to bed.

ERNEST. (*Patting her*)

Poor little Columbine
Weary from too much wine,
The grapes that for you bled —
(*As if hunting for a rhyme*)
Ah here, sweet, here is a bed.

THERE'S A DIFFERENCE

(*He leads her over to SHARP's bed. Pushes her into the alcove and draws the curtain*)

SHARP. For God's sake, Ernest! This is going too far.

ERNEST. (*Pushes SHARP back. Puts his finger to his lips*)

Sleep sweetly and dream
Kissed by moonlight beam;
Drive your fancy's team
Where only moonrays gleam.

SHARP. Nephew — take that female out of my bed. Good Heavens! What if Aunt Rachel came in here now.

ERNEST. Till Eulenspiegel's wits work fast. I have already thought of that. If Aunt Rachel came in here now, she would think Columbine was your mistress.

SHARP. (*Outraged*) My mistress!

ERNEST. Why not? You — (*Shakes his head*) have been married twenty years.

SHARP. Ernest, how dare you say such things? This is a respectable house. I am a respectable man.

THERE'S A DIFFERENCE

ERNEST.

But what did Eulenspiegel care
For damned respectability —
You wrote it in that book right there,
When Till was not yet known to me.

SHARP. I shall throw you both out of the house.

ERNEST. (*Halts him*) Tush, Uncle — you dare not wake Columbine when she sleeps.

SHARP. I shall call the police and . . .

ERNEST. (*Breaking in*) And wake up Aunt Rachel. Then Till Eulenspiegel will go piff, paff, poof, and disappear and Aunt Rachel will find Columbine in your bed.

SHARP. (*Desperately*) Oh! (*Pauses*) But think of my reputation.

ERNEST. It is too good already — Uncle.

SHARP. Don't you call me Uncle any more. Take that woman and leave this house at once — go.

ERNEST. Where to? — Out into the cold December morn? And Aunt Rachel — may she snore on — asked a blessing at dinner tonight on all the poor homeless creatures who wander the streets at night. Charity should begin at home.

THERE'S A DIFFERENCE

SHARP. But, Ernest, listen to reason — my whole night's rest is gone.

ERNEST. Never mind — mine has not yet begun. (*Pulls a flask from his pocket and takes a drink*) Come, have a drink, too. It will quiet your nerves.

SHARP. I never touched a drop.

ERNEST. Then have a cigarette.

SHARP. I never smoked. (*Protests loudly*) Put that away, I won't allow you to drink liquor in my house.

ERNEST. Do not shout so or you yourself will wake Aunt Rachel.

SHARP. My patience is exhausted.

(*Walks around room and then starts for the bed. ERNEST quickly wheels the gymnastic "horse" before the bed and mounts it, blocking him*)

ERNEST.

I am a brave crusader now
Who breaks his lance on pedantry;
Conventions have to make a bow.
I've snapped their chains and set life free.

THERE'S A DIFFERENCE

Giddap!

I shall fight against their cursed hold
Upon the world and mind of men;
No ancient knight can be more bold
Than I against commandments ten.

Giddap!

Come ride with me to poetry
And be yourself just once again
And hang your damned propriety
Before the moon begins to wane.

Giddap!

Come, ho, jump on this hobby-horse
And ride with me my fancy's course;
You say I am not fully wise
And think it meant for exercise.

SHARP. Ernest, be quiet — that drink has made
you crazy. You are drunk.

ERNEST. Yes, drunk with wine and woman and
a bit of poetry. (*Halts in his ride*)

THERE'S A DIFFERENCE

My rhymes are poor and metre worse
I merely sing a made-up song.
Now let me drive a prosy hearse
Of words that slowly trail along.
I'll follow common intercourse,
Dismounting now gymnastic horse.

(*Dismounts*) Listen, Uncle. (*Pushes him in a chair*) You must listen to me — a word and I shall become Till Eulenspiegel again and call for Aunt Rachel — so that she will hear me, though she sleeps so soundly, with doors and windows shut. But for the moment I philosophize. I will talk in your own terms. Uncle, you are too innocent — yes, innocent, though you are a married man. You have missed half of your life. For twenty years you have not had a new sensation or lived a new experience. You are ignorant, Uncle, an ignorant scholar. Here I am but twenty-two years old and how much more I know than you. I have not lived as long but I have lived twice as much — yes, in your own house. You have merely lived days and years. You have gotten up at six-thirty every morning and pulled these weights twenty times, then punched this bag

THERE'S A DIFFERENCE

for three minutes. You have gone to bed at ten every night and slept eight and a half hours. You have never altered this routine for twenty years. The day is for you what it is for this alarm-clock. (*Picks it up*) Look it in the face and see yourself. The night has been nothing to you except sleep and drinks of water. You open your window so that an army of imaginary microbes may be overcome by so many cubic feet of oxygen. You have never opened it to look out into the mystery of the moonlit night. You have never been drunk with wine or woman or song. And Aunt Rachel — has it been fear of her that made you deny every impulse — or has it been the great God Respectability? (*Walks excitedly over to punching-bag*) Good God, you have never hit this punching-bag (*Gives it a blow which resounds noisily*) just for the sake of hitting it.

SHARP. For Heaven's sake, Ernest, you will awaken Aunt Rachel. Be reasonable now, my boy, and go to bed. I will agree not to say a word and consider the incident closed. I'll give you another chance.

ERNEST. Give *me* another chance? It is I who

THERE'S A DIFFERENCE

am giving you your chance. Tell me, don't you want to live, to feel —

SHARP. You are not in a condition to talk reasonably tonight.

ERNEST. (*Shouts*) And I don't want to talk reasonably! I believe in folly. I want to save you from yourself. I cannot endure this suppression longer.

SHARP. (*A door is heard slamming off stage*)
What was that?

ERNEST. What?

SHARP. Oh, my God, Rachel has heard us. She is coming. Quick, turn out the light! (*He does so himself*) Get under the table! (*He shoves ERNEST on floor and himself dashes into the alcove. There is a moment's pause; then a scream from the alcove, and SHARP comes bouncing out*) My God, I can't stay in there — with that woman.

(*SHARP crawls under the table. ERNEST in the meantime has come out from under the table and is seen moving toward the doorway in back*)

ERNEST. (*Looking out the door*)

THERE'S A DIFFERENCE

'Twas nothing but the wind
A-playing with a blind.

ELSIE. (*Coming out of alcove, drowsily*) What's the matter?

ERNEST. Ah, Columbine — he disturbed your sleep. That deserves punishment. (*Picks up book*) "Till Eulenspiegel and His Merry Pranks." His victims were parsons and pedants. Professor, now you are his victim.

SHARP. For God's sake, Ernest, if Aunt Rachel came in here now?

ERNEST. And saw you in your pajamas? (*Looks at ELSIE*) I wish she had come — she shall come. I shall wake her out of her hippopotamus sleep. Till Eulenspiegel will not have a sorry ending to his prank. (*Seizes him and ELSIE*) Come with us, Uncle.

SHARP. Let me go! (*He tries to push ELSIE out of the door but she in her drowsiness clings to him with her arms around him. SHARP struggles to free himself*) Let go of me! Get out of here!

ERNEST. (*Standing aside and looking on*)

THERE'S A DIFFERENCE

Sweet Columbine
Your arms entwine
A pillar, ah me!
Of Society.

SHARP. (*Pushing ELSIE from him*) Get out of here!

ELSIE. (*Pouting*) Ugh, but you're a nasty old man. What kind of a place is this anyhow?

ERNEST. You cast Columbine from you, you adhere to tradition and conventions? Answer me!

SHARP. I am a decent man.

ERNEST. Ah, then, so be it. There's a difference — I see. It depends on the age when it happened and to whom. Yes, there's a difference. Then tradition it shall be. I shall likewise live up to the traditions of Till Eulenspiegel. (*Pushes ELSIE in chair*) Aunt Rachel! I shall play my merry prank. Aunt Rachel — then piff, paff, poof — I shall disappear. (*Goes off calling loudly*) Aunt Rachel, Aunt Rachel.

CURTAIN

LIKE A BOOK

CHARACTERS

OTIS DAVIS, *an artist.*

NORA, *his wife.*

FAY FORREST, *another artist.*

GRANT LINK, *a newspaperman.*

DASH, } *two habitants of Greenwich Village, New*
FELICE, } *York City.*

THE DEFENDANT.

The scene is a studio-apartment and a section of the hallway leading to it. The room is furnished with greater emphasis upon apartment than studio. A faint light burns in the hallway. At the rise of the curtain, DAVIS, FAY, LINK and FELICE are seen lounging about the room. DASH is sitting at a piano with his back turned to it. All give the impression of waiting for some one.

DAVIS. (*Looking at his watch*) Nora ought to be here by now.

FAY. Oh, you know Nora is always late.

DAVIS. As the charming Nora's only husband I am quite aware of that — only this time it is unusually late.

FELICE. Oh! we might as well wait a while yet. Let me have a cigarette, Dash — no, I don't like yours. Grant, what kind have you?

(*LINK throws her a box of cigarettes*)

DAVIS. I can leave a note and tell her to meet us at the Brevoort.

LINK. (*Looks at his watch*) We might as well wait *here* — we won't get a table for a half hour.

LIKE A BOOK

There are always a lot of people who leave around ten. They turn that place over like a movie-house Sunday nights — three times.

DAVIS. All right, then, we'll wait here. By the way, Grant, have you seen Edgar Moreau's new book?

LINK. No, but I want to get it. I hear it goes his last one, one better.

DAVIS. (*Going to the center table and picking up book*) I got a copy yesterday.

FAY. (*Joining him*) What's the title, I want to read it?

DAVIS. "Good and Evil."

FELICE. Oo! That sounds good.

DASH. Ha! Ha! — and is probably very wicked.

(*Turns and bangs the piano*)

LINK. (*To FAY, who is turning the leaves of the book*) I thought, Fay, that you couldn't see why everybody raved about Moreau.

FAY. Nor can I, but I'm fair enough not to judge without reading.

DAVIS. Also curious enough.

(*FAY sticks her tongue out at DAVIS*)

LINK. Have you read it, Otis?

LIKE A BOOK

DAVIS. No,—I haven't got very far. Nora's reading it first.

FELICE. To pass on it and see whether it's all right for friend husband?

LINK. I am going to get it tomorrow and see whether it is good enough for the Anti-Vice Society to suppress. If it is, I shall buy ten copies. You know I happened to have two copies of "Homo Sapiens" given to me and when it was suppressed I sold them for a lot of money each.

DAVIS. You don't really mean that.

DASH. Say, that's a great idea. Let's organize a "Down With Dirty Books Society," write them ourselves, then suppress them and sell at a 500 per cent profit. I'll be the chief taster of the firm. That'll be high finance.

FAY. Have you ever run into this man Moreau, Grant?

LINK. No, he's not the kind that shows himself at things newspapers report or Vigilantes organize.

FELICE. I'd like to meet him. They say he knows women like a book.

DASH. *Like a book* is probably right.

FAY. For once your flippancy shows sense.

LIKE A BOOK

Everybody says this man Moreau is a master *realist*, but he doesn't know women as they are.

LINK. Now don't say that, Fay, I think Moreau has the stuff.

FAY. Oh, yes, like all these men who they say know women, he has probably had no experience with them. Those men that have, don't claim to know them.

DAVIS. Well, I don't presume to know women, but Nora seems to think he gets right down to facts.

DASH. If I were Nora, I wouldn't admit that. He isn't very complimentary to women.

LINK. Oh, I wouldn't go as far as to say that. Moreau isn't a woman-hater like Strindberg. He has more balance and reality. Strindberg would make you think that women are only walking illustrations for Freud's theory of dreams; that the sexes are enemies and that women positively make men their prey.

DASH. That's just as nutty as the Suffering Sob-Sisters who want to make you believe that men prey on women.

FELICE. I've never read Moreau; which way does he look on the subject?

LIKE A BOOK

DAVIS. Neither one nor the other. He rather gives the circumstances and lets you judge yourself.

FAY. Yes, but he always colors the circumstances to throw the blame on the woman —

LINK. You mean discolors the circumstances?

FAY. Distorts them. I'll bet you that in any instance where a fair jury decided, it could be shown that women are more preyed upon than men.

DASH. Lord! I thought you were going to quote that famous old melodrama, "More Preyed upon Than Preying."

LINK. I don't agree with you, Fay. Maybe newspaper work twisted my sense of values but I can always find a little fault on both sides.

(DASH *turns around and plays*: "There's
A Little Bit of Bad in Every Good Little
Girl")

FELICE. Oh, Dash, can't you be serious? This is really an interesting discussion.

DASH. Oh, bosh — you will all talk seriously until doomsday and not get anywhere. If there is anything I hate it is a group of serious thinkers.

FELICE. Well, you know what you can do.

DASH. I will eventually, but let me tell you that

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every group of serious thinkers among women sooner or later generates a group of serious drinkers among men.

DAVIS. (*Interrupting*) I guess we might as well start. Nora has apparently been lost, strayed or stolen.

FAY. Maybe she stopped in at Helen's.

DAVIS. That's right. I'll call up there.

(As he turns to the telephone the others remain quiet. Presently the figures of a man and a woman appear in the hallway. The woman is cautioning the man to be quiet. Points across the hallway and then whispers to the man. He removes his shoes and with them in his hands follows the woman on tip-toes. DAVIS, in the room, sets down the phone, saying: "Don't answer." Suddenly the door bursts open and, pushed by the woman, the man stumbles into the room, holding his shoes aloft. There is a commotion. All exclaim, "Nora." NORA closes the door and leans against it. She points to the man, who is completely dazed and dumbfounded)

LIKE A BOOK

NORA. That man picked me up.

DAVIS. (*Approaches the man threateningly*)
What? . . .

THE DEFENDANT. (*Trying to go, stutters*) I,
— I,— beg,— beg your pardon.

NORA. (*Laughs loudly*) Isn't he funny? (DAVIS has reached her side and they block the man's departure) Oh, no, you can't go yet — I'm going to teach you a lesson.

(*Bursts out laughing again. Others gradually see the comic picture made by the man.*)

DASH is the first and joins NORA in laughing)

DASH. (*Pointing to the shoes*) What were you going to do with these — wear them on your hands?

THE DEFENDANT. (*Utterly confused, drops shoes and picks them up again. Tries to go*) This is really . . .

NORA. (*Laughing*) I told him I had a terrible aunt across the hallway who would kill him if she heard us and he took his shoes off so as not to make any noise.

LINK. (*Laughing*) That was pretty clever.

NORA. (*To DAVIS at the door as the DEFENDANT*

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tries to go again) Don't let him out till I tell the story — (*To DEFENDANT*) If I have forgotten any details, you can fill them in.

FAY. For Heaven's sake, Nora, stop laughing and tell it.

DASH. Come on, old man, make yourself at home. (*Wheels a chair around and pushes him in chair but he rises again*) We won't do anything to you.

DAVIS. Yes, Nora, what is the point of this? (*Sharply to the DEFENDANT*) What do you mean by following this woman to her apartment?

NORA. (*To DAVIS*) Don't be angry, dear. (*Laughs*) It's only a joke. Wait till I tell it.

THE DEFENDANT. (*Recovering his poise. From now on he gradually begins to become master of the situation*) Since I am to be held a prisoner, may I ask to be permitted to put my shoes on?

FELICE. What in the world did you take them off for?

NORA. That's part of the joke.

(DEFENDANT *sits down and puts on his shoes hastily*)

FAY. Aren't men undignified with their shoes off?

THE DEFENDANT. Please don't let this touch of

LIKE A BOOK

toilet embarrass you. (*To NORA*) I can readily appreciate your amusement, even though the joke is on me. (*Gets up*) I seem to have come upon a good-natured party (*Looks at DAVIS, who scowls*), with one exception. When you have told your story, I am sure I shall have the sympathy of the gentlemen in the party, since they must understand that I would hardly have approached the lady without some suggestion of an invitation.

DAVIS. See here — (*Starts toward him*) Don't you insult my wife or I'll smash your face.

THE DEFENDANT. Your wife!

DASH. (*Intercepting DAVIS*) Hold your horses, Otis. Come on, old top, don't make a noise like a husband now.

DAVIS. I won't have him insinuate that Nora flirts with strangers on the street.

THE DEFENDANT. It would really be better if I were allowed to go.

LINK. (*Jumping up*) Yippee! — Here's your chance, Fay. We were just talking whether men preyed on women or women on men. — Here we have a case that will settle it. We'll find out who started this — Nora or he?

LIKE A BOOK

DASH. Great! — We'll have a trial and weigh the testimony in the case. Each of them tells the story and we'll be the jury.

LINK. Nora will be the plaintiff and he the defendant — and the issue to be decided is whether woman is preyed upon or does the preying.

THE DEFENDANT. Perhaps the young woman might object.

NORA. Certainly not! — I am not afraid that the verdict will not be in my favor.

DASH. Come on, Davis, you be the judge — you look solemn as an owl.

LINK. No, Davis might be prejudiced. You be the spectators, Davis, that's a good rôle for a husband anyhow.

DASH. I'll be the judge. The rest of you are the jury.

(They arrange the table, chairs, and other furniture so as to give the room the appearance of an improvised court-room)

LINK. *(Suddenly catches the DEFENDANT, who tries to go)* Come on, old man. On behalf of the outraged husband whose anger still chokes him so that he forgets his duty as host, I invite you as our

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guest to aid us in settling this moral issue. We'll guarantee your safety.

DASH. Yes, let the judge give you a cigarette.

NORA. (*Half-aside to DAVIS*) Come on, dear; enter the spirit of this thing. He is really in a much worse position than you, and ever so much more graceful about it.

DAVIS. (*Grinning*) Was that meant as a compliment to me? But I'm on. (*Joins the others as they are assembling around the judge's desk*) Let's proceed!

DASH. Order in the court-room. Will some one please move that the minutes of the last meeting be dispensed with.

LINK. Oh, come on, Dash; that isn't court-room procedure.

FELICE. Link, you be judge. Dash isn't dignified enough.

DASH. Oh, shucks! Damn dignity! (*LINK. throws him out of chair*) Well, I'm going to be foreman of the jury.

FAY. You'd do best as court-crier.

DASH. Is that so? I'd like to know what Link knows about court-room procedure?

LIKE A BOOK

LINK. I guess I didn't cover night-court all winter for nothing.

THE DEFENDANT. In that event, may I hope you will have learned how *not* to dispense justice?

DASH. Say, you're some highbrow!

LINK. (*Assuming a judicial mien*) I assure you, sir, I will handle the scales of justice very delicately — to begin with I will use Edgar Moreau's latest book, "Good and Evil," for the oath instead of the Scriptures. Will the plaintiff take the stand? (NORA rises) Do you swear to tell the truth, and nothing but the truth?

NORA. I will.

DASH. Not "I will"—"I do"—you got that gloomy spectator (*Points to DAVIS*) by saying, "I will."

LINK. Order.

DASH. Ham and,—make it two.

FELICE. (*Claps hand over his mouth*) Keep still. Don't be so silly.

LINK. Now, madam, tell the story. You need not say anything that will incriminate you.

NORA. I have no fear. I got off the bus at the last stop in the square. It was such a wonderful

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night, I thought I'd walk around before coming home. This *person* was also on the bus and got off after me. . .

THE DEFENDANT. It was also my stop.

LINK. No interruptions.

NORA. He caught my eye as I turned to go. Previously, on the bus, I had felt him looking at me; you know how one feels those things.

DASH. How did you know it was he?

LINK. Davis, I appoint you bouncer. If Dash interrupts again he shall be removed. Proceed, madam.

NORA. He followed me. I didn't notice it first, but then he came alongside and as some people passed he knocked my handbag on the pavement and made me walk right into him. He apologized, picked up my bag and then kept right on walking with me. He didn't look like the men who usually accost a girl (DEFENDANT *laughs*) and wasn't impudent. He kept right on talking till we got to our door. I don't remember what was said but I suddenly got an idea. I knew you were all here and so I let him come up. I told him to be real quiet because I had a terrible aunt across the hallway and told him to

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take his shoes off. Then I pushed him in here. (*Laughs*) I never saw anyone so surprised in my life.

DASH. Man, you did look funny, standing there with your shoes in your hands.

LINK. Order!

DASH. What did you think had happened to you?

LINK. Order!

DASH. Throw me out — throw me out.

LINK. Listen, if we want a court-jester, we'll hire one. (*To NORA*) Is that all the plaintiff cares to say?

NORA. I think it is.

LINK. Will the defendant take the stand? What have you to say?

FELICE. Make him swear, by Moreau, too.

LINK. Oh, I forgot. Do you swear to tell the truth, all the truth and nothing but the truth?

THE DEFENDANT. Yes, your honor!

LINK. Now, go on with your side of the story.

THE DEFENDANT. The plaintiff's story is substantially correct. I caught her eye accidentally as we got off the bus. I noted her hesitation while

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she was drinking in the wonderful night. Then I noticed that she did not take the direction in which she had started but the one in which I was going. The handbag incident was accidental. People passing crowded us and the strings caught on my coat sleeve-button. The rest is as she said — painfully so.

FAY. There you have it. He pleads guilty.

THE DEFENDANT. To the circumstances but to the blame, No.

FAY. The circumstances don't leave any doubt.

LINK. We are departing from our case. It is more the equity than the law that is involved — whether he was justified in addressing the plaintiff?

DASH. It takes two to make a conversation.

THE DEFENDANT. You cannot decide that issue in a generalization — each case must be decided on its own merits.

FAY. Oh, bosh — you talk just like this fellow Moreau in his books — and then you have a man saying men are right and if a woman wrote the book she would say the women are right.

DAVIS. No woman can write like Moreau, I'll say that much for him.

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NORA. See here, I've got a right to cross-examine the prisoner, haven't I?

LINK. Correct — let us return to the case.

NORA. Have you ever picked up a woman before?

THE DEFENDANT. I beg your pardon — I have yet to admit that I “picked up” a woman — I have been picked up *by* a woman before, yes.

DASH. Why don't you ask her if she has ever been picked up before?

LINK. Oh, keep still, Dash.

THE DEFENDANT. Perhaps it would not be irrelevant if we first defined what a “pick-up” is. For instance, Moreau in this book upon which we took oath . . .

FELICE. Oh! Have you read it? Is it good?

THE DEFENDANT. Opinions differ.

FAY. Decidedly.

THE DEFENDANT. . . . but as I started to say — in this book, the man and woman meet by chance in a train — that might be called a “pick-up.” In that case, the couple eventually marry.

NORA. Oh, pshaw! Now you gave it away. I was getting all excited about whether they really get married or not in the book. (*To DAVIS*) It is
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almost like our own romance. Do you remember we first met by accident on a train when I was going to college?

LINK. Fay — please copy. I thought you said Moreau wasn't as much of a realist as he was cracked up to be.

FAY. Oh, you can't make a generality out of a coincidence.

DAVIS. Please resume the trial or Nora will think of some other book that has resemblance to her experiences.

FELICE. (*To DASH*) Ah! Smarty! Seems that knowing women like a book has some basis in reality.

LINK. The spectator wants the trial resumed — we are forgetting the issue. Does the plaintiff wish to continue with her cross-examination?

NORA. No — he just twists my questions around.

LINK. Does the defendant wish to question the plaintiff?

THE DEFENDANT. If she will permit? May I ask whether she has ever read any Scandinavian literature?

NORA. Some.

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THE DEFENDANT. For instance . . .

NORA. Oh, Strindberg, Ibsen, Bjørnsen. . .

THE DEFENDANT. Any others?

NORA. Ellen Key.

THE DEFENDANT. That's not literature. Any others? . . .

NORA. I can't think of any names.

THE DEFENDANT. Knut Hamsun, by any chance?

NORA. Not to my recollection.

FAY. Oh, Nora, that's the chap the funny countess talked so much about, isn't it?

NORA. Oh, yes, he isn't translated yet, though.

DASH. Oh, hell — what's all this got to do with the case?

THE DEFENDANT. A great deal.

DASH. Huh, you act like a corporation lawyer — ask about the moon to find out if you sold cold storage eggs. I object.

LINK. Objection overruled, go on.

THE DEFENDANT. Did the countess, as you call her, tell you the stories of any of Hamsun's novels?

FAY. Oh, yes, she told that one story about — why, Nora Davis (*Bursts out laughing*) — shame on you. Don't you remember?

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NORA. Remember what? — Oh! — (*Bites her lips*) Don't you say another word, Fay Forrest. I had forgotten —

THE DEFENDANT. Yes, so had I, or you wouldn't have caught me with my shoes off.

DASH. What's all this about? What's the idea?

THE DEFENDANT. This, that in a book by Knut Hamsun called, "Editor Lynge," one of the characters accosts a young lady on the street — asks whether he may accompany her home. She assents. On the stairway the young lady tells about a terrible aunt and makes him take his shoes off and then hurls the gentleman unexpectedly into a roomful of people, announcing dramatically, "This man picked me up."

NORA. (*As everybody bursts into laughter*) I had forgotten all about it.

LINK. The court charges the jury to declare the defendant not guilty.

THE MEN. Not guilty.

LINK. The women may be excused from voting on the question.

DASH. Oh, fireman, save my suffrage-badge.

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LINK. You are declared innocent. And say, old man, will you join us at the Brevoort?

NORA. Oh, it's too late. I have to get up early.

FAY. I won't go either.

FELICE. I'll stay here with Nora.

DASH. Very well — let us men go anyway.

FAY. Us men! There you have it. Just what I said about this Moreau man. (*Men are going*) He thinks he's smart and puts the blame on the women, just like you fellows do.

LINK. But, Moreau seems to have some knowledge of women after all. You know what Nora just said about her meeting with Davis — not to mention the incident where instead of books imitating life, Nora . . . if it isn't realism, it's uncanny insight.

FAY. Uncanny insight, bosh! Anyhow I don't care. That's all beside the point. After all, you are only men and Moreau is only a man.

THE DEFENDANT. Thank you, Madam, I fear Moreau is very much a man — I am Moreau.

(*Consternation among the women, as the men file out, led by MOREAU*)

CURTAIN

LIST IN BELLES-LETTRES

LIST IN BELLES-LETTRES

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